

# Active Learning Through Play

*Play teaches the child, without his being aware of it, the habits most needed for intellectual growth, such as stick-to-itiveness, which is so important in all learning. Perseverance is easily acquired around enjoyable activities such as chosen play. But if it has not become a habit through what is enjoyable, it is not likely to become one through an endeavor like school work.*

Bettelheim in Wasserman, S., 1990

**P**lay is a natural and universal learning activity of children and adults. It is a lifelong need and pursuit vital to all human beings. Play is motivated by an inner drive to imagine, explore, experiment, discover, and learn.

The primary program views play as a critical part of the growth and development of young children. Primary age children learn through play and it is the fundamental means children use to express themselves. Play is closely connected to a child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. These experiences give children feedback that helps them to make sense of their world and gives adults insights into a child's development.

Play allows learners to project themselves into the realm of possibility while enabling them to develop, alter, and refine current understandings as they explore, imagine, imitate, construct, discuss, plan, manipulate, problem-solve, dramatize, create and experiment. Through play, children demonstrate their knowledge, represent their experiences, and further explore their world.

The ability to play requires skills that developmentally evolve for each child as they gain play experiences through:

- Initiating play choices
- Maintaining a focus in play
- Staying with an activity
- Creating and experimenting
- Using a variety of play materials and activities
- Enjoying play
- Joining a group and playing with others
- Communicating and negotiating wants and needs

(Educational Productions, Inc., *Hand-in-Hand Video Series*, 1993.)

Teachers prepare the active learning environment with time, space and materials for play. Teachers facilitate play skills as an essential learning experience that supports the needs and abilities of all children. Children learn best when they can choose their own activities. Play is the work of children and should not be considered in conflict with academic learning for children through grade three. Adults provide opportunities for play and learning through the variety of materials and activities they provide. Children engage

in the learning because it becomes an expressive activity that results from a desire to make sense of the world in which they live.

## References

- Educational Productions, Inc. (1993). *Hand-in-hand: Supporting children with play problems* (video series). (Available from Educational Productions, Inc., 9000 SW Gemini Drive, Beaverton, OR 97008.
- Wasserman, S. (1990). *Serious players in the primary classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.